



MONTHLY HIGHLIGHTS

NOAA
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE
NORTHEAST REGION
HABITAT CONSERVATION DIVISION

February 2001

GLOUCESTER, MA OFFICE, ONE BLACKBURN DRIVE, GLOUCESTER, MA 01930

GROUNDFISH AND SEA SCALLOP SCOPING FOR EFH COMPONENTS OF FMPs

The scoping period for the development of the Supplemental Environmental Impact Statements for the essential fish habitat (EFH) components of the Northeast Multispecies (Groundfish) and Atlantic Sea Scallop Fishery Management Plans has been extended from March 5, 2001 to April 4, 2001. A public scoping meeting was held on March 22, 2001 at the Northeast Regional Office in Gloucester, MA.

NMFS is considering the need to revise EFH designations for groundfish and scallops based upon any available new scientific information, and is considering potential designations of Habitat Areas of Particular Concern. NMFS will consider a range of alternatives to minimize adverse effects of fishing activities on EFH. We are seeking public input both to identify EFH management issues and develop alternatives to minimize, to the extent practicable, adverse effects of fishing on EFH. Your comments early in the development process will help us address issues of concern in a thorough and appropriate manner. (Lou.Chiarella@noaa.gov; 978/ 281-8277)

NATIONAL RESEARCH COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON ECOSYSTEM EFFECTS OF FISHING STUDIES EFFECTS OF BOTTOM TRAWLING ON SEAFLOOR HABITATS In a study commissioned by the National Marine Fisheries Service, the National Research Council (NRC) began its investigations into the habitat impacts of bottom trawling. This review is just a portion of the charge to the NRC's Committee on Ecosystem Effects of Fishing, which was formed to review the broader issues associated with how fishing effects the nation's marine ecosystems. The first meeting for the study was held at the New England Aquarium on February 5-6, 2001. Presentations spanned topics including discussion on general ecological frameworks for understanding impacts to a review of the New England Fishery Management Council's approach for considering habitat impacts in its fishery management plans. Several other regional meetings will be held across the nation, and a final report should be available within 18 months. (Dianne Stephan, 978/ 281-9397 or Tom Bigford, 301/ 713-2325)

DREDGED MATERIAL MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR GLOUCESTER, MA

The National Marine Fisheries Service has reviewed the Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) filed jointly by the City of Gloucester and the Massachusetts Office of Coastal Zone Management which investigates potential options for the disposal of Gloucester Harbor dredged material. The critical issue and focus of the DEIR is disposal of contaminated dredged material unsuitable for unconfined open water disposal. The total volume of sediment to be dredged from Gloucester Harbor is approximately 514,440 cubic yards (cy) of which 276,000 cy are assumed to be unsuitable for open water disposal. The DEIR includes an analysis of alternative upland and aquatic dredged disposal sites and recommends disposal at four Confined Aquatic Disposal (CAD) sites located in the outer harbor.

NMFS preliminary comments cite the necessity of an EFH assessment, with particular concern about the spatial and temporal magnitude of the four proposed CAD cells, and the need for restoration of the benthic habitat following final capping. The four CAD sites would cumulatively impact approximately 29 acres of benthic habitat. However, the DEIR simply indicates that the cap material would be comprised of clean dredged material without specifying grain size. Recolonization of the cap material by benthic organisms will be rapid for some shorter-lived organisms and longer for others. NMFS recommended that the benthic habitat recovery should be enhanced by incorporating three-dimensional structural characteristics provided by including cobbles and small boulders in the surface layer of the cap. This enhancement would help offset both the short-term and long-term construction related impacts to benthic habitat. **(Eric W. Hutchins, 978/ 281-9313)**

JAMES J. HOWARD MARINE SCIENCES LABORATORY, HIGHLANDS, NJ 07732

NEWPORT DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATES

The Habitat Conservation Division (HCD) has reviewed a revised plan submitted by Newport Development Associates which reduces the fill associated with their proposal to install 905 linear feet of steel sheetpile bulkheading along the Hudson River. The proposal is part of the redevelopment of the northeast quadrant portion of their property in Jersey City. Based upon the revised plans, it appears that our outstanding concerns have been resolved and the impacts to aquatic resources, including essential fish habitat have been minimized. **(Karen Greene, 732/ 872-3023)**

NEW JERSEY TURNPIKE AUTHORITY

HCD has reviewed the final wetlands enhancement plan for the Secaucus Interchange Project. Unfortunately, this plan is the same plan we opposed in 1998 which would fill and shade wetlands in the Hackensack Meadowlands for the construction of a new New Jersey Turnpike spur to serve the Allied Junction/Secaucus Transfer Station project. The Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE) issued a permit for the project over our objections and the objections of the US EPA and the US Fish and Wildlife Service. We remain opposed to the mitigation plan as proposed because the plan relies on the use of berms and water control structures to create and to maintain the needed hydrology for the enhancement of the wetlands at the site. We are also concerned about the quality of the water entering the site since the source of the water appears to be stormwater outfalls and combined sewer outfalls. We have recommended to the ACOE and the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection that revised

plan be developed. **(Karen Greene, 732/ 872-3023)**

BASF NEWARK BAY PROJECT

HCD staff responded to a letter from representatives of BASF, Inc. requesting written comments on their report entitled "Regulatory Consultation Document for Future Ecosystem Development near the Mouth of the Passaic River, Kearny, New Jersey." Our letter reiterated our concerns about BASF's proposal to fill 150 acres of intertidal and shallow water habitat in northern Newark Bay with dredged material to create a "wildlife refuge," and explained our position that we do not consider this project to be a beneficial use of dredged material. We recommended strongly that BASF contact the New York District Army Corps of Engineers to discuss the documentation required for the submittal of the Department of the Army application and to arrange a pre-application meeting with the appropriate agencies. However, because the purpose and goals of the document remain unclear, we could not provide any substantive comments to BASF on the document. **(Karen Greene, 732/ 872-3023)**

DUPONT REMEDIATION

Habitat staff attended a meeting on February 22, 2001 at New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) in Trenton with state and federal agencies to discuss the suitability of the mitigation plans for the Dupont Chambers Works Facility Interim Stabilization Measure (ISM) on the Delaware River in Pennsville Township, Salem County, NJ. NMFS has recommended that compensation be made for the filling of 1.5 acres of intertidal and subtidal habitat in the Delaware River which is necessary in order to contain contamination. A mitigation proposal to enhance 3.8 acres of an enclosed tidal basin located adjacent to the Helms Cove area of the Delaware River was discussed. Dupont proposes "to enhance the fisheries value of Helms Basin by restoring normal tidal flows to the area and by reestablishing a desirable vegetative cover that will provide cover and feeding areas for fish and as well as provide a source of detrital matter that will be exported to the adjacent estuary." Discussions included the necessity of contaminant testing at the site to determine suitability, of increasing the opening to the basin to allow more water in and out and of the necessity to characterize the site (benthos and fish studies, vegetative presence, elevations at high and low tide) to use as a baseline against which enhanced habitat values can be compared. **(Anita.Riportella@noaa.gov, 732/ 872-3116)**

NEW JERSEY ARTIFICIAL REEF PROGRAM

Early in February, HCD staff in Sandy Hook discovered, through an article in the Asbury Park Press that the New York City Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) had approximately 1,300 subway cars that were no longer usable for the city's subway system. The cars, built in the 1940's out of sheet metal, were being made available to the New York State and the New Jersey State artificial reef programs, as well as to other states. The article went on to state that New Jersey was planning to accept 650 cars, and that the action was heralded by many of the local sportfishing groups as a needed addition to the state's established artificial reefs.

Even though the Philadelphia District, ACOE issued a 10-year general permit to the New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife for the artificial reef program, HCD staff were concerned with the potential impacts of the subway car disposal on essential fish habitat. A letter was sent from the Regional Office requesting that the ACOE undertake an EFH assessment. Meanwhile, some environmental

organizations were opposing the subway car disposal, citing the fact that the cars contained asbestos as well as other contaminants. Responding to the growing controversy as presented in the media, the office of New Jersey's Acting Governor set a meeting in Trenton, New Jersey on February 28 with concerned parties to establish a task force to examine the issues surrounding this proposal. HCD staff attended the meeting, which resulted in no resolution except that the concerned parties agreed to continue meeting and to examine the issue in greater detail. **(Stan Gorski, 732/ 872-3037)**

SALEM NUCLEAR GENERATING STATION (NGS)

In response to an announcement from the NJDEP asking for comments on a proposal to issue a permit to Public Service Electric and Gas Company to allow the Salem NGS, in Salem county, New Jersey to continue operating with once-through cooling, NMFS/NER submitted a comment letter. While recognizing that closed cycle cooling would significantly reduce impingement and entrainment impacts to Delaware Estuary fisheries, NMFS did not oppose issuance of the permit. NMFS's letter did, however, suggest some modifications to the proposed permit conditions, and recommended that the NJDEP undertake an EFH assessment of the plant's operation. **(Stan Gorski, 732/ 872-3037)**